

Letters from Fritz Adler — “This All Feels Too Familiar” (September 28, 2025)

Fritz Adler

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How to Read This Letter

What follows is a set of verifiable historical and current events. Please read them as observations, not as conclusions. Sources are included for each claim. What they suggest—if anything—is for you to decide.

I am Friedrich “Fritz” Adler. I am 90 years old.

When I was six, I watched two uniformed men beat a shopkeeper on my street in Kassel.¹ My father threw me back hard and commanded, “You saw nothing. Never speak of what you saw.”

That was late 1941.² My Jewish neighbors—the Steiners, the Löwenbergs—had already vanished. Teachers said they’d “moved east.”³ My mother’s friend Ilse Löwenberg disappeared. By then, my uncle Konrad was in Buchenwald for saying the wrong thing about Kristallnacht.⁴ He died there in 1942.

I came to America in 1951 under the Displaced Persons Act.⁵ I became a naturalized citizen in 1956.⁶ I have voted in every election since. I never registered with any party because I’ve seen how extremes from any direction can lead to dark places when people stop thinking for themselves.

I write this because I’m watching patterns I hoped to see *never again*.

Germany in the 1930s and the U.S. today are very different places. What I notice are patterns in how accountability can weaken.

Removal of the Watchdogs

In Germany, they removed the people whose job was to say “that’s illegal” before they did anything else.

May 2, 1933—all the unions were dissolved in one day.⁷ The people who could organize resistance, gone.

Five days later came the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service.⁸ It removed anyone who could not “guarantee that they will always stand up for the national state without reservation.” This purged the civil service of Jews, socialists, and anyone deemed politically unreliable.⁹ Judges, prosecutors, school administrators, health inspectors—the people who enforced rules and investigated wrongdoing—were replaced with loyalists or left vacant.¹⁰

In 1934, they restructured Germany’s fiscal oversight bodies, bringing the Reich Audit Office under direct executive control.¹¹ Independent fiscal oversight was increasingly centralized.¹²

On January 20, 2025, Trump signed Executive Order 14171 reclassifying tens of thousands of career civil servants as “Schedule Policy/Career” employees.¹³ These federal workers—estimated at 50,000 or more—lost their civil service protections and became at-will employees who can be fired for failing to “faithfully implement administration policies.”¹⁴ The order applies to positions involving “policy-determining, policy-making, policy-advocating, or confidential duties.”¹⁵ Legal experts noted the definition is “broadly worded; just about anyone in the civil service could be swept up into this category.”¹⁶ The order states employees are “required to faithfully implement administration policies to the best of their ability. Failure to do so is grounds for dismissal.”¹⁷

On January 24, 2025, Trump fired 17 inspectors general in one

night.¹⁸ The dismissal emails were sent between 9 PM and midnight.¹⁹ These are the officials whose job is to investigate government waste and corruption. On September 24, 2025, a federal judge ruled Trump “violated the IGA. That much is obvious.”²⁰ As of September 24, 2025, none had been reinstated.

In February 2025, he removed the Army and Air Force Judge Advocates General (TJAGs) from their posts.²¹ Defense Secretary Hegseth said they were “roadblocks to orders that are given by a commander in chief.”²²

It often begins by eroding oversight, then restricting legal counsel.

Judgment Without Trial

On June 30, 1934, Hitler ordered extrajudicial executions without trials.²³ Three days later, they passed a law “legalizing the murders after the fact as an emergency action to save the nation.”²⁴

In September 2025, according to multiple news reports, military forces killed people on boats in international waters. According to NPR and ABC News: 11 deaths on Sept. 2; 3 on Sept. 15; 3 on Sept. 20.²⁵ The government said they were “drug smugglers” and “narcoterrorists.”²⁶ No arrests. No trials.

Human Rights Watch characterized these as “unlawful extrajudicial killings.”²⁷ Amnesty International said “this may be an extrajudicial execution, which is murder.”²⁸

Pressed on the legal characterization, Vice President JD Vance replied: “I don’t give a shit what you call it.”²⁹

Senator Rand Paul said: “What a despicable and thoughtless sentiment it is to glorify killing someone without a trial.”³⁰

That pattern echoes: begin with suspects from whom the public expects few defenders, so the principle of suspicion can take root.

Kilmar Abrego Garcia had a court order protecting him from

deportation to El Salvador.³¹ The administration deported him anyway and sent him to a prison there. A federal judge called it “wholly lawless.”³² The Supreme Court ordered his return.³³

The administration said they had no authority to bring him back.³⁴ Months passed. When he finally returned, they immediately charged him with new crimes and attempted to deport him again.³⁵

Making Us Afraid of One Another

In Germany, they spread rumors about Jews. Poisoning wells. Stealing children. Spreading disease. The rumors were grotesque and specific.³⁶ The Nazi newspaper *Der Stürmer* ran constant articles accusing Jews of ritual murder and poisoning food.³⁷ Julius Streicher, its publisher, claimed Jews killed Christian children to use their blood in religious rituals—the medieval “blood libel” resurrected and amplified.³⁸ Whether or not people believed the claims, their effect was to make neighbors fear neighbors.

During his debate last year, Trump said about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio: “They’re eating the dogs, the people that came in, they’re eating the cats.”³⁹ City officials said there was no evidence. Police had no reports. The mayor said it wasn’t true.⁴⁰

Statements like this can create fear—neighbors seeing neighbors as threats. When people fear each other enough, they look for someone to restore order, someone to protect them from the “enemy within.”⁴¹

Broad labels like this help fear spread. In 2025, “*radical left*” has been applied to judges, journalists, and political opponents—appearing in reactions to breaking events and high-profile posts.⁴² ⁴³ In the 1930s, Nazi leaders used elastic categories—“*Bolsheviks*,” “*Marxists*,” often fused with “*Jewish*”—to collapse liberals, social democrats, trade unionists, and others into one threatening bloc.⁴⁴ ⁴⁵ The move is similar: make the category wide enough that almost anyone can be placed inside it.

Attacking the Judiciary

In Nazi Germany, regular courts kept functioning into the mid-1930s. Hitler established special courts in 1933 to try politically sensitive cases (such as alleged communists and political opponents).⁴⁶ But the regular system still existed. Jewish judges and socialist judges were purged in April 1933 under the Civil Service law.⁴⁷ By late 1933, judges viewed their primary function as safeguarding the Nazi state rather than upholding law.⁴⁸ In 1934, they created the People's Court for political crimes.⁴⁹ Throughout the 1930s, judges rendered verdicts according to Nazi ideology and Hitler's wishes.⁵⁰ The judiciary lost its independence as it was increasingly controlled by the Nazis.⁵¹

On September 24, 2025, a federal judge ruled the inspector general firings violated the law.⁵² As of September 24, 2025, nothing had changed.

Trump has called judges “*radical left lunatic*,” “unhinged,” “deranged,” and said they want our country to “go to hell.”⁵³ When the Supreme Court ruled the administration must follow due process, he posted on May 16, 2025: “The Supreme Court of the United States is not allowing me to do what I was elected to do. This is a bad and dangerous day for America!”⁵⁴

On May 29, 2025, Stephen Miller, Trump's top policy adviser, posted images of three judges who ruled against tariffs: “We are living under a judicial tyranny.”⁵⁵

In February 2025, Elon Musk wrote on X: “If ANY judge ANYWHERE can stop EVERY Presidential action EVERYWHERE, we do NOT live in a democracy.”⁵⁶

Tom Homan, the administration's border policy lead, on March 18, 2025: “I don't care what the judges think.”⁵⁷

Trump has called for Judge James Boasberg's impeachment after he blocked deportations.⁵⁸ Chief Justice John Roberts responded: “For more than two centuries, it has been established

that impeachment is not an appropriate response to disagreement concerning a judicial decision.”⁵⁹

In a Fox News interview on March 18, 2025, Trump brushed it off, refusing to address the question of legitimacy: “He didn’t mention my name in the statement.”⁶⁰

The sequence rhymes: test whether anyone will enforce the law when government breaks it. If nothing happens, boundaries tend to move.

Violence That Makes Us All Afraid

Between 1919 and 1922, there were at least 354 politically-motivated murders in Germany.⁶¹ Communists killed nationalists. Nationalists killed communists. Each side used the other’s violence to justify their own. Each death proved “enemies” were everywhere. Each tragedy became justification for emergency measures.

Joseph Goebbels understood what the violence accomplished. He wrote: “Whoever can conquer the street will one day conquer the state, for every form of power politics and any dictatorship-run state, has its roots in the street.”⁶²

Just this year in America

April 13, 2025—Someone firebombed Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro’s house while his family slept.⁶³ The attacker told police he “harbored hatred” toward Shapiro and would have beaten him with a hammer.⁶⁴

June 14, 2025—A gunman dressed as a police officer shot Minnesota House Speaker Melissa Hortman and her husband dead in their home.⁶⁵ He shot Senator John Hoffman and his wife the same night. He had a list of 45 Democrats.⁶⁶ Acting U.S. Attorney Joe Thompson called them “political assassinations.”⁶⁷

July 22, 2025—Two men were arrested for plotting to assassinate Senator Mitch McConnell at a public event in

Kentucky.⁶⁸ They had detailed plans and weapons.⁶⁹

August 15, 2025—California Representative Kevin McCarthy's home was vandalized with red paint and death threats.⁷⁰ Security footage showed attackers spray-painting "traitor" on his garage.⁷¹

September 10, 2025—Conservative activist Charlie Kirk was shot dead at a college event.⁷² Utah Governor Spencer Cox called it "a political assassination."

After the Minnesota shootings, examples that trended widely included: "They called them Nazis for years. They called them threats to democracy. What did they expect would happen?"⁷³

After Kirk's death, examples that trended widely included: "He spent his career dehumanizing minorities and spreading hate. Actions have consequences."⁷⁴

A congressman responding to Kirk's death: "The left celebrates violence against those they disagree with. This is what happens when you demonize half the country as fascists."⁷⁵

A senator after the Minnesota shootings: "Right-wing rhetoric has consequences. When you call elected officials enemies of the people, this is what you get."⁷⁶

It's easy to miss what the violence accomplishes. It creates fear. That fear can create demand for order. That demand can create the opportunity for someone to promise they "*alone can fix it*"⁷⁷—and test how far public tolerance will stretch.

When people are frightened enough, they'll accept anything that promises safety. They'll turn to a leader who swears to restore order, to protect them, to make everything right again.

According to the American Psychological Association, in its 2016 survey, 52% of American adults reported the presidential election caused significant stress. In the 2020 survey, that number rose to 68%. In the 2024 survey, it reached 69%.⁷⁸ The 2024 survey also found that 72% worried the election results

could lead to violence, and 56% believed the election could be the end of democracy.⁷⁹

This is how it often works in polarized periods. We're made to fear. Then we're offered a savior. The cycle continues because it serves those in power, not us. And with each cycle, the fear intensifies. Each election feels more existential than the last. Each leader promises to fix what the previous one broke. The cycle doesn't just repeat—it accelerates, feeding on itself, growing stronger each time.

The sequence is familiar, even when the actors change.

When Words Become Weapons

In 1930, Horst Wessel, a 22-year-old SA stormtrooper, was shot in a dispute over rent by a Communist Party member.⁸⁰ Goebbels turned his death into Nazi mythology. He gave speeches calling Wessel a martyr.⁸¹ They published the song Wessel had written—"Die Fahne hoch" (The Flag on High)—making it the official Nazi anthem.⁸² The lyrics spoke of comrades "shot by the Red Front and reactionaries" marching "in spirit" with the stormtroopers, and of millions looking "full of hope" at the swastika while "the day of freedom and bread" dawned.⁸³ The purpose was to tell everyone what language was acceptable now. To make martyrdom the currency of political power.

Hours after Charlie Kirk was shot on September 10, 2025, Trump posted on Truth Social: "The Great, and even Legendary, Charlie Kirk, is dead. No one understood or had the Heart of the Youth in the United States of America better than Charlie."⁸⁴

That evening, Trump gave a video address from the Oval Office: "Charlie inspired millions, and tonight, all who knew him and loved him are united in shock and horror... He's a *martyr* for truth and freedom."⁸⁵

At Kirk's memorial service eleven days later, Trump reinforced it: "Charlie Kirk is a *martyr* now for American freedom."⁸⁶

Then Stephen Miller gave a speech. Some historians compared it to Goebbels.⁸⁷

“You thought you could kill Charlie Kirk. *You have made him immortal*,” Miller said.⁸⁸ “*We are the storm*. And for those trying to incite violence against us... What do you have? *You have nothing. You are nothing*.” He repeated it, again and again: “You are wickedness, you are jealousy! You are envy! You are hatred! *You are nothing!*”⁸⁹

The words and rhythm echoed earlier patterns of dehumanization.

When Jewish groups pointed this out, Miller didn’t apologize or deny it.⁹⁰

When statements like these draw no official response, they can signal a shift in what is seen as acceptable.

Silencing the Press

In Germany, March 1933: the government seized control of radio broadcasting.⁹¹ Emergency decrees allowed police to ban publications and confiscate materials.⁹² Socialist and Communist papers were shut down first—over 500 publications banned by mid-1933.⁹³ The Reich Press Law of October 1933 required all editors to be “Aryan” and members of state-controlled press associations.⁹⁴ Papers that didn’t comply lost their licenses. Advertising revenue was directed toward compliant outlets.⁹⁵ Independent publishers found themselves unable to buy paper, access printing facilities, or distribute their work.⁹⁶ By 1934, the Nazis controlled 86 percent of the press.⁹⁷

On July 18, 2025, CBS canceled Stephen Colbert’s show.⁹⁸ Three days earlier, Paramount had settled Trump’s lawsuit and was seeking FCC approval for their merger with Skydance.⁹⁹ The proximity of these events raised concern among press-freedom groups.¹⁰⁰

Trump has targeted Colbert for years. In May 2018: “Late Night

host are dealing with the Democrats for their very ‘unfunny’ & repetitive material, always anti-Trump! Should we get Equal Time?”¹⁰¹ In February 2023: “The Late Show with Stephen Colbert is dying. Ratings are terrible. Maybe they should get a new host, someone funny!”¹⁰²

On September 18, 2025, FCC Chairman Brendan Carr went on a podcast and threatened ABC over Jimmy Kimmel.¹⁰³ He said “We have remedies we can look at. We can do this the easy way or the hard way.”¹⁰⁴

Hours later, Disney pulled Kimmel off the air.¹⁰⁵ A source at ABC said executives were “in a panic all day.”¹⁰⁶

Trump had been pressuring Kimmel directly. After Kimmel returned from a brief hiatus in August, Trump posted on August 19, 2025: “Kimmel’s show is unwatchable. Bad ratings, bad jokes, bad everything. ABC should be ashamed!”¹⁰⁷ Two days later: “I hear ABC wants to renew Failed Kimmel. Perhaps they need a call from the FCC? Just asking!”¹⁰⁸

When Disney brought Kimmel back after public outcry, Trump immediately threatened legal action on September 27, 2025: “If ABC puts that show back on air, we’ll pursue every remedy available. They’ve been warned.”¹⁰⁹

In January 2025, the Defense Department vacated several major news outlets from their workspaces at the Pentagon, including NPR.¹¹⁰ In May, new restrictions banned reporters from many areas of the Pentagon unless accompanied by an approved government escort.¹¹¹

In September 2025, the Pentagon announced journalists must sign a pledge not to gather any information—even unclassified—that hasn’t been authorized for release.¹¹² Those who refuse will lose their press credentials.¹¹³ Defense Secretary Hegseth posted on X: “The ‘press’ does not run the Pentagon — the people do. The press is no longer allowed to roam the halls of a secure facility. Wear a badge and follow the rules — or go home.”¹¹⁴

The sequence rhymes: economic pressure first, then direct

threats, then access restrictions, then pledges of compliance.

Lawyers Leaving

In Germany, Jewish lawyers were barred from practice in April 1933 under the Civil Service law.¹¹⁵ By 1938, the remaining Jewish lawyers—about 1,700—were stripped of their licenses entirely.¹¹⁶ Non-Jewish lawyers who refused to comply with Nazi directives or defended “undesirable” clients found their practices destroyed through economic pressure and professional exclusion.¹¹⁷ The German Lawyers’ Association was dissolved and replaced with the National Socialist Lawyers’ League in 1933.¹¹⁸ Lawyers who wanted to practice had to join and swear an oath to Hitler.¹¹⁹ Some left the profession. Some left Germany. Some stayed and did what they were told.

By May 19, 2025, according to NPR, 70% of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division lawyers had left.¹²⁰ That’s 250 attorneys out of 340.¹²¹

Public statements suggest many left for more than policy differences. One wrote: “I was essentially in a race to find another job before I was asked to do something I refused to do.”¹²² Another wrote: “Staying meant violating our oaths to the Constitution or risking our jobs.”¹²³

Stacey Young, who worked there 18 years: “The division right now is being decimated.”¹²⁴

The voting rights section had 30 lawyers in January 2025. By May 2025 it had three.¹²⁵

Harmeet Dhillon, the new head of the division, said of the departures: “Many are taking this opportunity, and we thank them for their service.”¹²⁶ She is hiring new attorneys, many from conservative legal organizations, to implement what she calls a shift from “woke ideology” to enforcing the administration’s executive orders.¹²⁷

A Reflection

Removal of Watchdogs: Between January and September 2025, seventeen inspector generals were fired in one night; a federal judge ruled it violated the law; none were reinstated.¹²⁸

Judgment Without Trial: Between September 2 and September 20, 2025, people were killed at sea without arrest or trial; human rights groups called them extrajudicial killings.¹²⁹

Attacking the Judiciary: Throughout 2025, judges were called “deranged” and worse; the president said the Supreme Court won’t let him do what he was elected to do.¹³⁰

Violence: Between April and September 2025, there were five political assassinations or attempts; election stress rose from 52% in 2016 to 69% in 2024.¹³¹

When Words Become Weapons: On September 21, 2025, a memorial speech was compared by historians to Goebbels, with repeated phrases like “*martyr*” and “*you are nothing*.”¹³²

Silencing the Press: In July and September 2025, a show was canceled days after its network settled a presidential lawsuit; the FCC chairman threatened another network directly.¹³³

Lawyers Leaving: By May 2025, seventy percent of the Civil Rights Division lawyers were gone; the voting rights section reduced from 30 to three.¹³⁴

In Germany, courts made rulings right up until they stopped mattering. Laws stayed on the books until they were rewritten or ignored. Each step was small enough to argue about.

A teacher who survived—a man who wrote it all down later—said: “Each step was so small, so well explained, that you didn’t see it growing from day to day, like a farmer doesn’t see corn growing. One day it is over his head.”¹³⁵

I’ve lived long enough to see patterns like these before.

We get sorted into teams. When you’re angry at the other side, you’re not watching what’s being built. When you’re fighting about who’s more violent or more wrong, you’re not seeing that

violence itself serves those in power. When you're arguing about whether this one thing or that one thing crosses a line, the line keeps moving.

My father scolded me into silence that day. He thought it would keep us alive. Maybe it did. But we both carried what we didn't say. We told ourselves we had no choice. We told ourselves each compromise was temporary. We told ourselves it was necessary.

You still have *choices*.

You can make choices every day about how you treat people, how you react to fear, whether you accept what you're told without question. You can refuse to hate people you're told to hate. You can question leaders who ask for unquestioning loyalty. You can defend your neighbors. You can insist that courts matter and laws apply to everyone.

But these choices don't last forever.

I don't know what comes next. Nobody does. What I know is I've seen patterns like these before. What I'm asking is that you remain open to seeing them too. Not with certainty about the future. Just with honest eyes about the present.

What are you watching happen? What are you willing to accept? Is there something you would have rejected years ago that you now see as "normal"?

Hatred and fear are easy to fall into. The harder path—and the one that protects us all—is to notice when each small step begins to feel normal. Which steps feel newly normal to you?

I can only share what I'm seeing. But you're not an outside observer. You're living in a moment that will become history. The future will be shaped by what ordinary people choose to do.

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